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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8846
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 2008

In Today's Papers

Bush, Menendez, Pelosi on Anniversary of 'Events of 1915'
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report Robert Menendez, the US Democratic Senator who two years ago vetoed the nomination of Richard Hoagland as ambassador to Armenia, has said he will do the same if President Bush's new ambassadorial nominee Masha Yanukovitch also fails to characterize the mass killing of Armenians at the hands of Ottoman Turkish forces in 1915-16 as "genocide." Menendez said if Yanukovitch does not respond to the questions during Senate confirmation hearing in a satisfactory way, he would "not hesitate to place a hold" on her nomination.

Papers report during a commemoration meeting in Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told several pro-Armenian lawmakers that both the US Administration and Congress were late in designating the Armenian killings as "genocide." She called on the Congress to pass genocide resolutions. Pelosi told mainstream Milliyet that the 'events of 1915' had nothing to do with the existing Turkish state, and "it happened during the Ottoman Empire." Papers also report President Bush avoided the word "genocide" in a message released April 24 to commemorate the killings.

Sarkisian: Yerevan to Step up Efforts for Armenian Genocide Recognition

Hurriyet, Sabah, Vatan, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Armenia's new president Serzh Sarkisian vowed Thursday that his administration would step up efforts for international recognition of the 'genocide' of Armenians during World War I. The remarks came only days after Ankara said it was seeking dialogue with the new Armenian administration, says mainstream Hurriyet. Papers report the Turkish flag was trampled on during official ceremonies held yesterday in Yerevan to mark the anniversary of the killings. Under the headline "Hateful Commemoration in Yerevan," mainstream Vatan says thousands of people trampled the Turkish flag. The demonstrators burned a Turkish flag in an earlier rally in Yerevan.

'What Happened in 1915?' Conference in Istanbul

Mainstream Milliyet reports the Human Rights Association (IHD) held Thursday an Armenian conference, "What Happened on April 24, 1915," at Istanbul's Bilgi University. Ara Sarafian, the head of the Gomidas Institute in London, said there were around two million Armenians living in Anatolia during the Ottoman Empire before 1915. "Today it is not possible to find any historical or social mark memorializing them," said Sarafian. "The Armenian question would be resolved here, not anywhere else. It could be resolved through jointly working with independent Turkish academics," said Sarafian, stressing he wouldn't work with "official historians" who were in fact "public servants."

Asad Confirms Turkey Intermediates for Syria-Israel Peace

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Syrian President Bashar Assad confirmed yesterday to Qatari daily al-Watan that Prime Minister Erdogan called him Tuesday to convey a message from Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that Israel was ready to withdraw from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria. Assad noted Turkey has been intermediating between Israel and Syria since April 2007. He said direct talks with Israel might be kicked off after the presidential elections in the US. Mainstream Milliyet reports Prime Minister Erdogan is to travel to Syria on April 26-27 to participate in the first meeting of the Turkey-Syria economic forum. Erdogan will meet Assad and Prime Minister Mohammed Naji Otri.

Editorial Commentary on Israel-Syria/Turkey

"The Ankara Dove"

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah (4/25): "The ongoing

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speculation about Turkey's mediation between Syria and Israel was confirmed by Syrian leader Beshar Assad. 'The Prime Minister of Turkey has informed me about Israel's readiness to withdraw from the Golan Heights in exchange for a lasting peace' Assad said. This is a result of Turkey's mediation efforts since April of last year, but the history of this goes back to 2004 when Assad visited Turkey, the first Syrian presidential visit to Ankara in 57 years. He told Turkish officials about Syrian intentions to make peace with Israel and implied Damascus' readiness to see Turkey as a mediator. Now, Prime Minister Erdogan will soon leave for Damascus with the intent to accomplish the mission. However, it is not realistic to expect both sides to sit down immediately and begin direct negotiations. Syria wants direct negotiations with Israel under US sponsorship. This is not possible with the current US administration with Syria in the axis of evil category. The process will have to wait for a new US administration. Washington can make it happen or can cut off the process."

"Turkey, the Official Mediator"

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet (4/25): "Following Assad's statement, the ongoing efforts by Turkey to mediate a peace between Israel and Syria is no longer a secret. As Assad revealed, this secret diplomacy centers on peace in exchange for a return of the

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Golan Heights to Syria. His statement is a bit premature, but it presents hope for the Middle East and it's important to keep the momentum going. Turkey's key role in this process comes as no surprise. By having good relations with both Syria and Israel and being a reliable country, Turkey is one of the very few countries that can accomplish such a mission. But, we are just beginning a tough and long process. If Israel is ready to return the Golan Heights in exchange for peace, other details, including security issues, Israeli settlements and water resources, will be the thorny part. According to former President Carter, who recently visited the region and met with Assad, there is agreement on the issues of borders, water resources and international inspection. If that is true, then we should be optimistic for the future of this process."

MGK Meeting Calls for 'Consultations with All Iraqi Groups'

All papers report a declaration issued at the end of yesterday's

Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) meeting said the MGK "agreed that it would be in Turkey's interests to continue consultations with all Iraqi groups and movements." Papers interpret this as "positive signals" from Ankara for a possible dialogue process with Massoud Barzani, the Kurdish regional administration head in northern Iraq. Mainstream Sabah says Barzani has recently indicated he wants to improve ties with Turkey, and that he was ready for talks. The MGK meeting signaled a new period in ties with Iraq, according to Sabah. The declaration also stressed the Armenian diaspora's efforts to garner support for its "ungrounded accusations" would produce no results. The MGK also discussed the PKK, Cyprus, and Armenia.

Leading AKP Figure Criticizes Party Policies

Hurriyet, Vatan, Radikal and Cumhuriyet report AKP lawmaker, Vahit Erdem, critiqued his party policies in a local newspaper in his election district of Kirikkale. Erdem said the AKP's constitutional amendments concerning headscarf freedom were "wrong." "The headscarf is neither a religious nor a political priority, it has to be resolved through compromise," Erdem said. He emphasized the AKP hasn't managed to become a "center-right party." Erdem also theorized the AKP's election vote total would have been below 40 percent if last April's controversial presidential election process had not happened.

Baykal Expected to Keep Chairmanship at CHP Congress

All papers report the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) general congress will kick off over the weekend in Ankara. During the two-day gathering, CHP leader Deniz Baykal could face as many as four challengers -- namely Haluk Koc, Umut Oran, Tolga Yaman, and Ayhan Yalcinkaya -- for the party helm. Businessman

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Umut Oran, the youngest challenger, said he would beat Baykal at the congress if he was backed by 253 delegates for nomination. Oran said he aims for not only the party leadership, but also the prime ministry. Baykal's supporters, however, are confident he can win another term. Papers voice doubt that Baykal's rivals could even find the necessary support of 253 votes from the party delegates in order to run for the top post in the party.

TV Highlights CNN Turk

Domestic News

- The Turkish General Staff (TGS) has confirmed press reports that Turkish warplanes attacked the PKK targets in northern Iraq on April 123.

- Constitutional Court vice-president Osman Paksut said EU statements concerning the lawsuit for banning the AKP would have no impact on judges.

- Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir has been acquitted in a lawsuit for inciting hatred with his remarks that "Diyarbakir is the Kurds' stronghold."

International News

- Energy Minister Hilmi Guler said Turkey might cooperate with Royal Dutch Shell in oil exploration in Iraq.

- Armenians in Iran have not been allowed to rally to commemorate the events of 1915.

- Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said on Thursday parties that walked out of Iraq's government last year have agreed to rejoin the cabinet.

WILSON